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AROUND THE NATION

Retired General Wins Acquittal of Embezzling Charge

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—A retired two-star Air Force general was acquitted yesterday of embezzling from a secret \$450,000 military spy fund he managed in Swiss bank accounts from 1975 to 1978.

The jury deliberated two hours and 20 minutes before clearing retired major general Richard B. Collins, who hugged his lawyer when the verdict was announced.

Military witnesses testified that the account bankrolled top secret missions, but specific uses of the fund, opened in 1965, were not discussed in court.

Prosecutors had charged that Collins, 55, once an aide to former secretary of state Alexander M. Haig Jr., shuttled money between Swiss banks, stealing \$19,000 of the interest it earned. The account was closed when Collins retired in 1978.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Barbara Nicastro, in a case she acknowledged was largely circumstantial, called as witnesses two of Collins' former girlfriends, who testified that from 1976 through 1979 he took them on European trips and gave them costly gifts.

The government has not said what sparked its probe, which began in 1982. Collins' lawyer said it was the result of a vendetta by one of Collins' former subordinates. Collins faced a possible 60-year sentence.